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ABSTRACT

This investigation was conducted in order to compare gains in knowledge of selected reading concepts of preservice teachers in their senior year of a four-year academic, undergraduate teacher education program at the University of Dallas, regardless of course sequencing and past scholastic achievement. Sixty preservice teachers, taught by the same instructor, were administered the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge in Reading prior to and following instruction. The findings indicated that requiring a course in children's literature before classes in methods of teaching reading increased the knowledge of selected reading concepts. The students who followed the new course sequence of children's literature had initial gains on knowledge of selected reading concepts and sustained these gains compared to the students who had the traditional course sequence of methods of teaching reading prior to children's literature. (WR)

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Children's Literature: A Prerequisite For Courses In The Teaching Of Reading In A Preservice Teacher Training Continuum In Elementary Education

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CS 001 523

Children's Literature: A Prerequisite For Courses In The Teaching Of Reading In A Preservice Teacher Training Continuum

Introduction

Reading is the process of interpreting written or printed verbal symbols. Although reading can be defined simply, the process is a complex one. When a child sounds out the symbols, but does not understand them, this is not reading. He is practicing only one of the many skills involved in the total process. The key characteristic of reading is meaning, which is not inherent in the symbols, but rather is the result of the stimuli that arouse concepts and images in the mind of the reader. The process of gaining new meanings depends upon the meaning the reader brings to the procedure. Reading must be an active process involving interpretation, reflection, purpose, and organization.

Teaching reading is a complex task. There are many discrete skills that the child must learn. According to Tinker and McCullough, there are seventeen skills related to word meaning, twenty to word analysis, thirteen to types of comprehension,

twenty-five to study skills, and eight to skills of oral reading.(18) (Tinker and McCullough, 1962). Just as important are the independent efficient reading practices related to habits, attitudes, values, tastes, and interests. (Jones, 1971). (11)

Values and attitudes refer to feelings, whereas tastes represent the quality of the choices or experiences. In reading, taste is the free choice of the quality and character of writing. Interest is the basis or generator of voluntary reading activity. In reading instruction, two processes are important:

(1) the discovering of interests that the individual brings to the instructional setting based on past experience; and

(2) building or capitalizing upon those interests to aid reading development and to develop new and continuing interests in reading. (Jones, 1971). (11)

Current interests can be used to aid reading instruction; but unless they are expanded, the individual stands little chance of becoming a regular and continuing reader. The latter is the school's ultimate goal: continued reading for pleasurable leisure-time activity; for learning more about self, about the world; and for aesthetic development. There is an interaction of interests and reading that the school nurtures. (Heilman, 1964).(8)

To understand more fully the relationship between the interaction of interests and reading, this paper presents the role of a university course in children's literature for development of interests and the role of a university course in teaching reading for development of instruction.

A prime consideration of teachers in instructing elementary school children is to develop a desire to reading. This goal is often over-shadowed by the concern with teaching children how to read. This writer believes that teaching children to read is only half of the issue--teachers must also help children develop a taste for reading.

The assumption underlying this research was that university students preparing for teaching must themselves be knowledgeable about literature for children before they can inspire and guide youngsters in the reading process. It seems logical that the teacher with a real interest in and love for children's literature can more effectively inspire children toward permanert interest in books. (Odland, 1967). (13) As you do not see seeing, or hear hearing, you do not read reading. Therefore, those preparing to teach young children to read need first to know and recognize the many ways that non-text-books might be used to achieve the objectives of the reading program; and secondly, know and recognize the skills necessary to perform the reading act.

Many concerned and knowledgeable educators have felt for some time that over-reliance on method courses for preservice teachers is largely responsible for the lack of enthusiasm toward literature that appears in children. (Huus, 1973). (9) Fortunately, in the past few years there has been a promising trend toward courses in which trade books of all kinds are used to whet the appetites of children and to leave with them a lasting desire to read.[3] (deHirsch, 1966). Shumsky gives a convincing argument for courses based on children having experiences with literature:

> . . . reading should be equated with a rich program aiming at promoting language facility and intellectual curiosity about books. A program of this nature illustrates to the child, the process of transforming ideas into reading matter. (Shumsky, 1965, p. 92). (15)

The sequencing of the continuum for preservice teachers by requiring a course in children's literature before classes in reading (methods of teaching reading) is going from the simple to complex; readiness for teaching reading to formal teaching of reading. Deliberate, consistent use of children's literature in the reading program could prove to be a healthy addition to current strategies with university students, both before they begin to learn how to teach reading and at each step of the developmental process. It is certainly time for a re-evaluation of the use of children's books in the reading program and a sharpening of the effectiveness of methods utilized by teachers in bringing children and books together.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the research was:

(1) to implement a new sequence in the continuum of language arts for University of Dallas students specializing in elementary education.

(2) to statistically evaluate the changes in reading concepts of students specializing in elementary education that adhere to the new sequence with students specializing in elementary education who follow the traditional sequence of courses, regardless of past achievement as determined by grade point averages earned at the University of Dallas.

Definition of Terms

The new sequence refers to a course in children's literature prior to a course in teaching of reading for the elementary teacher. The traditional sequence refers to a course in teaching of reading for the elementary teacher prior to a course in children's literature.

Methods and Procedures

The subject of children's literature and reading was used in this study for several reasons:

(1) children's literature is an area which is not normally integrated with the teaching of reading. (Hall, 1971). (7)

(2) children's literature is usually not a pre-requisite for courses in reading. (Texas Woman's University Bulleting, 1971, et al). (17)

(3) knowledgeable preservice teachers in the field of children's literature can effectively inspire children to read. (Austin, 1972 and Wiberg, 1970). (2) (21)

The total number of preservice teachers in this research project were sixty, non-randomly selected seniors majoring in elementary education at the University of Dallas. The sixty preservice teachers were taught by the same instructor in the usual manner. The Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading[1] (Artley and Hardin, 1971) was administered as a pretest and posttest procedure. The pretest was administered one week after school began in January, and the posttest was given in May of the same school year. The Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading was developed to aid in assessing an individual's understanding of the reading act, and the strategies used in reading instruction on the elementary level.

Analysis of Data

The *t* Test for two independent samples was used to test the null hypotheses which involves comparisons between different groups.

The pretest and posttest were given to determine if a significant difference in knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading existed between the groups of non-randomly selected preservice teachers in elementary education because of a change in the sequencing of courses for preservice teachers at the University of Dallas, regardless of past scholastic achievement. The hypotheses were retained or rejected at or beyond the .05 level of significance.

Null Hypotheses

The hypotheses, stated in the null, were formulated and statistically evaluated by *t* Test comparisons for two independent samples. These hypotheses were:

(1) The students involved in this study will not significantly differ in their pretest knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

(2) The students involved in this study will not significantly differ in their posttest knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

(3) The students involved in this study will not significantly differ in mean gain knowledge of selected reading concepts on the posttest as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

(4) The students in the new sequence initiated in this study will not significantly differ from the students in the traditional sequence because of past scholastic achievement as determined by grade point averages earned at the University of Dallas.

Review of Literature and Research

In the area of reading instruction, research has identified the teacher as the crucial variable in the success or failure of the reading program. (Guszak, 1972; Fader and McNeil, 1968). (6) (4) Given the importance of the teacher within the reading program, a basic assumption may be made: the quality of a teacher's professional preparation determines, to a great extent, whether that teacher is a successful reading instructor.

Kasdan and Kelly concluded that most content courses for preservice teachers deal with instruction in techniques of diagnosis, remedial instruction, and instruction in word attack and comprehension skills. They stress the importance of courses in the affective areas as developing and promoting reading interests, enhancing personal growth through reading, and promoting enjoyment through understanding literature for children. (Kasdon and Kelly, 1969). (12)

Creating in children an appreciation of literature is a basic part of the reading process. Necessary to the development of that appreciation is a well correlated literature program promoted by a knowledgeable teacher. Equally important to the development of literary appreciation in children is the establishment of a creative, sequential program of literature activities designed as an intrinsic part of the total reading plan. (Whitehead, 1970). (20) Such a plan views literature as a functional part of the total reading program, making a significant contribution to both reading and spontaneous readers. How a teacher approaches the teaching of reading--how she feels about literature for children--goes a long way in determining children's lifelong attitudes toward reading. (Iverson, 1968). (10) If the teacher sincerely understands and appreciates the values of children's books and stories, knows the developmental reading process, and has an understanding for the

purposes for teaching reading, the results will be a balanced program in language arts. (Reasoner, 1972). (14)

The cultivation of permanent reading interests should be regarded as highly as the development of reading ability; for to learn how to read and then not do so will serve no great purpose. (Weingarten, 1954). (19) Literature must provide the means through which children can experience enjoyment; otherwise, they will not include reading among their preferred leisure time activities. The teacher's responsibility is to guide children through the world of books so they can discover their treasures. This responsibility is often negated when preservice teachers follow the program in teacher education that has a course in "how to teach reading" prior to a course in "what is there for children to read."

The main emphasis, and rightully so, of a course in teaching reading is the faceting of the act of reading: phonemes, graphemes, vowel clusters, structural analysis, decoding, and many other facets which are minutely examined. Most of the reading instruction in the preservice training of elementary teachers of reading has as its target the development of skills which will enable the preservice teacher to instruct children how to read. (16) (Smith, 1965). Preservice teachers are involved from the beginning of their training more with the mechanics of reading than they are with its artistry. With this type of conditioning can preservice

teachers move back to the Gestalt of reading--the wholeness of imaginative writing for children, the appreciation of children's literature, or the understanding that will enhance their professional lives? After examining The Cat in the Hat for its linguistical oriented patterning of CVC, can the preservice teacher appreciate the rhythmic, pulsating, whimsical, nonsensical story of a delightful cat? (5) (Geisel, 1957). This writer suggests the appreciation for the pure joy of the writing should come first.

Summary of Data

This investigation was conducted in order to compare gains in knowledge of selected reading concepts of preservice teachers in their senior year of a four year academic, undergraduate teacher education program at the University of Dallas leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree and certification in elementary education by the Texas Education Agency, regardless of course sequencing and past scholastic achievement.

The following null hypotheses were rejected:

HO_1 The students involved in the study did not significantly differ in their pretest knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

HO_2 The students involved in the study did not significantly differ in their posttest knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory of Teacher knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

HO_3 The students involved in the study did not significantly differ in mean gain score knowledge of selected reading concepts on the posttest as measured by the Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading, regardless of course sequencing.

The following null hypothesis was retained at or beyond the .05 level of significance:

HO_4 The students in the new course sequence initiated in the study did not significantly differ from the the students in the traditional course sequence because of past scholastic achievement as determined by grade point averages earned at the University of Dallas.

Discussion

Findings in the study indicate that, contrary to most preservice training continua for elementary teachers, requiring a course in children's literature before classes in methods of teaching reading increases the knowledge of selected reading concepts.

Therefore. it is reasonable to assume that sequencing of courses in the language arts continuum for preservice elementary teachers should be re-evaluated and re-examined in light of this research.

Teaching children to read is only half of the reading process, as born out by the research in this study. The students who followed the new course sequence of children's literature prior to methods of teaching reading had initial gains on knowledge of selected reading concepts as measured by the Inventory and sustained these gains compared to the students who had the traditional course sequence of methods of teaching reading prior to children's literature. It can be assumed that preservice teachers must develop an appreciation for reading, not just how to teach reading.

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